

Well done for finding this isolated church built of local Spilsby sandstone rubble, laid in rough courses. Sutterby is a Scandinavian place name, probably meaning the settlement of a shoemaker.

Excavations undertaken in 2015 revealed a burial from around the time of Domesday so this points to the existence of a church here then. However, it is not the present church as the same excavation showed that the present church was originally longer and was constructed over the burial. The church is therefore likely to be twelfth century in date, remodelled as most Lincolnshire churches were in the early fourteenth century and randomly repaired thereafter.

Records for the church are scarce. However, we do know that the Advowson, or right of presentation, rested with the Benedictine nuns in Chester from at least 1219 when it was recorded as a gift to them by Matilda de Mohaut. It really can't have provided them with much income and was too far away to easily manage and invest in which is probably why it remained so small.

It is obvious from the local landscape that there was once a settlement here, but in 1334 the Lay Subsidy Return shows Sutterby as one of the smallest villages in the county, and further depopulation followed the Black Death. By the

eighteenth century only 5 households survived. Surprisingly the church continued as a parish church in its own right until 1935. It was declared redundant in 1971 and quickly fell into dereliction. It passed into the care of the Friends of Friendless Churches ten years later. Today the Friends is assisted in its work by an active group of local volunteers.

The oldest feature of the church is the Romanesque doorway visible outside on the north wall. It was probably originally the main door to the church in the south wall but was moved here when the present south doorway, in a more up to date style, was inserted in the fourteenth century. The church was originally 2 metres longer to the west, its foundations discovered in 2015. It was probably shortened in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Two bells were sold in the eighteenth century to finance church repairs, although the turret survived into the mid-twentieth century and can be seen in an old picture displayed in the porch.

All around the church you find repairs carried out in brick. These are of eighteenth century date at a time when it was easier to 'make do and mend' than worry about the appearance of the church. A Faculty for repairs was granted in 1743. The church has been covered in slates since at least 1882.



Interior

The font is an interesting hybrid. The bowl is medieval with each of its eight sides displaying a traceried panel of fourteenth-century design. On the north face is a metal hasp which, together with the fittings on top of the font, once held a wooden cover in place. Around the rim hundreds of people have literally 'left their mark' in the form of initials, dates and scratches over the years.

The chancel screen, dividing the nave from the diminutive chancel mainly dates from the nineteenth century. It is asymmetrical with five lights on the north side and four on the south. Each main light is matched by a double tracery opening above whilst below is a frieze of quatrefoil openings giving a clear view of the altar from the nave. Only two panels of the medieval screen survive.

Above the screen are traces of a Royal Arms painted on plaster and most likely to be those of King Charles II (1660–1685). It is just possible to discern the unicorn. Further remains of wall paintings survive over the south door. This is part of a panel incorporating a Biblical quotation, although only the scroll base can be picked out clearly. Stylistically this dates from the eighteenth century.

The pulpit was commissioned by the Friends. When the church was rescued from dereliction only fragments of the eighteenth-century pulpit survived; these were incorporated into the structure you see today. The door is substantially original as is part of the moulding on the back board.



Romanesque doorway





Not far from Sutterby

St Peter, Saltfleetby

Church-moving is rare. But in 1877, the church of St Peter's was suffering structural movement and was moved to more solid ground. The medieval tower was left behind... (residual tower only)



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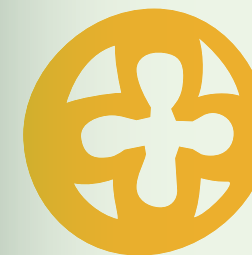
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Church of St John the Baptist Sutterby

a guide to its history